

PROSPECT; or, *View of the Moral World.*

SATURDAY, October 6, 1804.

No. 44

Comments upon the Sacred Writings of the Jews and Christians. Exodus Chapter 24.

More conjuring impositions of Moses under pretence of associating with celestial power.

THE secrecy with which the Jewish leader managed all his plans, stamped them with hypocrisy and deception. We shall see in this chapter another dexterous effort to blind the eyes of an ignorant and credulous people; we shall see Moses and seventy-three more theological conjurers, pretending to hold mysterious intercourse with God himself upon the *sacred mount*. This mountain seems to have been the source, the fountain head, from which issued forth all the degrading impostures and arbitrary impositions to which Moses subjected the twelve vagrant tribes. In the two first verses of this chapter it is thus written, "And he said unto Moses, come up unto the Lord, thou and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. And Moses alone shall come near the Lord; but they shall not come nigh, neither shall the people go up with him." It is evident here upon the very face of the record, that this spiritual aristocracy had no other object in view than the establishment of a theocratic despotism over a credulous, ignorant and refractory race of men. whether this was the best method of managing such a people as the Jews, is a question at present of no importance; the question with us is, whether the book is divine? This should be answered in the negative from the character of the matters herein contained. Moses steals away into the mountain by himself, pretends to talk with God, and returns full of theological instructions to the people! Suppose any clergyman, or legislator of the present day, were to travel into any part of the Alleghany mountain, and after remaining there for some time,

should return to the shores of the Atlantic full of instructions and commands from the creator to the people of these states, would he be believed or his legation be considered as divine? No, all his pretensions would be set aside, and his efforts stamped with imposture and fanaticism. Why then should we believe a story of a similar nature concerning Moses and the Jews? Is it because it has been transmitted down from high antiquity and sanctioned by education and authority? Yes this is the only reason, because, inherently considered, there is no more cause of credence in the one case than there would be in the other. It is time to examine every thing upon the ground of its own merit;—to bring every thing to the test of evidence and experience, and then prejudice, authority and the influence of a bad education will cease to distort and destroy the moral faculties of human nature.

Theological Enquiries continued.

The age of scripture belief has been the most dreadful æra, and the most calamitous to the human race that history has recorded. In one war the crusade which was about a rotten piece of wood the cross of Christ, there was more money spent, blood shed cruelties committed, than in any war either before or since. At the taking of Jerusalem 20,000 Turks were slain, and notwithstanding a proclamation of pardon, the Christians put to death all the Turks found in the city without regard to age or sex with the same zeal as the authors of those days call it wherewith Saul slew the Gibeonites.

It is not my intention at this time to enumerate the evils that this system has occasioned. Experience has sufficiently shewn how miserable man has been during the whole age of scripture belief, and that the system itself is giving way very fast to the light of reason, which alone can give man an adequate idea of an intelligent first cause and of the means which he has provided for our improvement and happiness.

It is only my intention to shew that the true God can only be known by the investigation of reason contemplating the mighty fabric of the Universe and perceiving throughout the whole a unity of design and a wonderful contrivance. This is the first perception or glimpse of the deity; the actions upon which all our future reasonings must be founded, and from which all the knowledge we can attain of him or of his ways with man is drawn. By beginning at the source we shall see nothing in the supreme intelligence but immense goodness and power, no partialities, no injustice or eternal punishment for crimes of a moment, or for acting in obedience to the unalterable laws of nature.—Led by the light of reason man will perform his duty as a son under the eye of a kind parent; he will perform his duty because he sees it to be the road to self-satisfaction, and that he is acting a part in a great work, which he is desirous of seeing accomplished. He considers himself as belonging to the great family of mankind, and is assured that his own happiness cannot be complete without a regard to the happiness of the whole family. In his opinion Heaven itself could not be the seat of happiness, if such a place as Hell has an existence in the universe. But he who has no other check to his vicious propensities but a fear of Hell-fire, thinks, that were that obstacle removed, man would riot in vice and in the gratification of every lust, little does he think that virtue may be loved and followed with as much arder, if not more, than vice, when we have a good opinion of the justice and goodness of God. But how is it possible men should be virtuous when the God they pretend to worship is represented as a tyrant and unjust, whose forgiveness for an ill spent life may be obtained by the most ridiculous ceremonies or foolish credulity.

We have therefore undertaken to expose and set in its true light the character of the God of the Hebrews as it is represented in the first books of the Bible to shew that he was not the true God but an imaginary being conjured up to serve the political purposes of Moses—to shew

also that men who believe in such a God cannot be virtuous, or good citizens, or believe in the *true* God; and this is the only reason why so much iniquity abounds.

Although the three æra's that I have noticed are remarkable in the history of the human mind, yet it must not be understood that I think the principles of the Age of Reason have never made their appearance; because I place that æra as following the other two, or that there are no other æras—no—the case is, that although there never has been an æra which could be justly denominated the Age of Reason, yet its principles have been recognized in all ages, and in every country where there has been man who had courage to divest themselves of the prevailing prejudices, and use the faculties of their own minds to discover truth; and several of the authors of the Bible were certainly men of this description; such were the authors of the book of Job; of some of the Psalms and several chapters of Isaiah, (for both these books appear to be a collection) and also the Prophet Malachi and Jesus the son of Sirach (apocryphal) and finally Jesus Christ himself and the authors of the Apostles and Jude—all these were men evidently exercising their own reason on the works of God, and which men will in all ages, and in every country without communication with each other, have nearly the same sentiments, and be prompted by reflection to the same duties.—Universal good will and peace to man.

To be continued.

FOR THE PROSPECT.

Christians are continually talking of the mild charitable and beneficent spirit of their religion, but if we were to judge from the conduct of its votaries toward those who differ from them in opinion, we should certainly draw a very different conclusion. The believers in this religion, ever since its commencement, have been influ-

enced by a spirit of persecution and extermination toward those who could not believe their doctrines. And this illiberal and unnatural principle they have always put in practice when it has been in their power. But what is still a stronger proof of the uncharitable and malignant spirit which Christianity infuses into its believers is, that the different sects into which it is divided and subdivided, hate, despise, and persecute each other as bad as they do those who reject the whole system. They seem not only to have adopted the opinion that "he who believeth not in their religion shall be damned," but that he who does not understand its mysterious dogmas in the way that they understand them shall likewise be damned. The Presbyterian says the Quakers will all be damned, because they do not baptise with water, and for some crime of equal magnitude all the other sects but his own must suffer the same fate. And in this manner the several sects of this religion damn all but their own.

So that influenc'd with holy pride,
 They save themselves, damn all beside,
 And think they can't serve heaven so well,
 As with its creatures filling hell.

LLOYD.

There is certainly great reason to distrust the divine authenticity of a religion which has inspired its followers with this malignant spirit of persecution which has inundated so large a portion of the earth with human blood, which has infligated so many religious wars, and caused such bloody cruelties to be committed for the promotion of this vile system of superstition, which has created so many family quarrels, set the father against the son, and the son against the father, broke through all the ties of nature, eradicated that affectionate friendship which would otherwise have subsisted between near relations, and destroyed the harmony of society, and the happiness of the human race. Can it be possible that a religion

which has produced so much wickedness and misery was intended by the God of the universe to be our moral guide.

If we judge of the cause by its effects, as we do in other cases, we shall be lead to conclude, that the religion of Christ is as uncharitable as that of Mahomet, who told his followers they should be rewarded in heaven for killing those who would not embrace his doctrine.

ANTONINUS.

Reciprocation of sympathetic justice. An Epitaph upon Martin Elmrod, taken from an old English Magazine.

Here lies Martin Elmrod,
Have mercy on his soul good God,
As he would on thine if he were God,
And thou wert Martin Elmrod.

Profession of Faith from Rousseau, continued.

Men must entertain very ridiculous notions of the Deity, indeed, if they imagine he can interest himself in the gown or cassock of a priest, in the order of words he pronounces, or in the gestures and genuflections he makes at the altar. Alas! my friend, where is the use of kneeling? Stand as upright as you will, you will be always near enough the earth. God requires to be worshipped in spirit and in truth: this is a duty incumbent on men of all religions and countries.

I did not set out at first, with these reflections. Hurried on by the prejudices of education, and that dangerous self-conceit, which ever elates mankind above their sphere, as I could not raise my feeble conceptions to the supreme Being, I endeavored to debase him to my ideas. Thus I connected relations infinitely distant from each

other, comparing the incomprehensible nature of the Deity with my own. I required still farther a more immediate communication with the Divinity, and more particular instructions concerning his will: not content with reducing God to a similitude with man, I wanted to be farther distinguished by his favour, and to enjoy supernatural lights: I longed for an exclusive and peculiar privilege of adoration, and that God should have revealed to me what he had kept secret from others, or that others should not understand his revelations so well as myself.

Looking on the point at which I was arrived, as that whence all believers set out, in order to reach an enlightened mode of worship, I regarded natural religion only as the elements of all religion. I took a survey of that variety of sects which are scattered over the face of the earth, and who mutually accuse each other of falsehood and error: I asked which of them was the right? Every one of them in their turns answered *theirs*. I and my partizans only think truly; all the rest are mistaken. *But, how do you know that your sect is in the right? Because God hath declared so. And who tells you God hath declared so?* My spiritual guide, who knows it well. My pastor tells me to believe so and so, and accordingly I believe it: he assures me that every one who says to the contrary, speaks falsely; and therefore I listen to nobody who controverts his doctrine.

How, thought I is not the truth every where the same? Is it possible that what is true with one person can be false with another? If the method taken by him who is in the right, and by him who is in the wrong be the same, what merit or demerit hath the one more than the other? Their choice is the effect of accident, and to impute it to them is unjust: it is to reward or punish them for being born in this or that country. To say that the deity can judge us in this manner, is the highest impeachment of his justice.

Now, either all religions are good and agreeable to God, or if there be one which he dictated to man, and will punish him for rejecting, he hath certainly distin-

guished it by manifest signs and tokens, as the only true one. These signs are common to all times and places, and are equally obvious to all mankind, to the young and old, the learned and ignorant, to Europeans, Indians, Africans and savages. If there be only one religion in the world that can prevent our suffering eternal damnation, and there be on any part of the earth a single mortal who is sincere and is not convinced by its evidence, the God of that religion must be the most iniquitous and cruel of tyrants. Would we seek the truth therefore in sincerity, we must lay no stress on the place and circumstance of our birth, nor on the authority of fathers and teachers; but appeal to the dictates of reason and conscience concerning every thing that is taught us in our youth. It is to no purpose to bid me subject my reason to the truth of things which it is incapacitated to judge; the man who would impose on me a falsehood, may bid me do the same: it is necessary, therefore, I should employ my reason even to know when it ought to submit.

All the theology I am myself capable of acquiring, by taking a prospect of the universe, and by the proper use of my faculties, is confined to what I have laid down above. To know more, we must have recourse to extraordinary means. These means cannot depend on the authority of men: for all men being of the same species with myself, whatever another can by natural means come to the knowledge of, I can do the same; and another man is as liable to be deceived as I am: and if I believe, therefore, what he says, it is not because he says it, but because he proves it. The testimony of mankind, therefore, is at the bottom that of my reason, and adds nothing to the natural means God hath given me for the discovery of the truth.

To be continued.

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